

Advent – Joy

Interview with Fiona Hemstock

Introduction

❖ The Advent theme for today is Joy...why do you think Joy is a theme in Advent?

‘Advent’ is about ‘coming towards’ something – in this case we’re coming along to a celebration – Christmas! Christmas is about celebrating life – a new life coming into being on earth. So it is quite a natural response to be joyful in Advent.

Let’s just think of the words, Joy – joyful, joyous, rejoice, enjoy!

Joy is so positive – so life-affirming! It can be quite spontaneous, or it can be expectant (as we are at the moment). It can be expressed by just one person or it is even greater if it is shared, because then it is ‘magnified’.

❖ Can you tell us about Joy in your life?

To me, Joy is about the Joy of Being. Quite simple. It’s wonderful to be. I see my life as being a gift of God. God has given me life – and God IS the life in all living creatures. We associate God with Love, so I am living ‘in love’. Love leads to gratitude, and gratitude leads to joy.

I jotted down some examples of joy through the week. I hope you did, too. It’s wonderful how often you can feel joy in an ordinary day!

Opening the curtains in the morning and looking out – it’s usually a wonderful sky and the birds are having a good tweet. Of course, I looked out today and the sky was completely grey. But as I looked, I saw the agapanthus drinking up the rain and bursting into flower.

Hearing really good news: with Christmas on the way, it could be ‘there’s a baby on the way’. It’s also a time of year when old friends write to us and share their good news of the past year.

Finding a new insight about life – that ‘Aah! Moment’. I’m reading a great book about Jesus being a teacher in the ‘Wisdom tradition’. It’s giving me lots of ‘Aah! moments’.

Being in the garden, and watching buds appear, buds become flowers and flowers become fruit. Beautiful!

Experiencing the countryside from hill-tops, the vastness, the sky, the emus, the parrots, the views.

Passing the Peace in church – everyone spreading peace, love and joy.

❖ **Do you think there is a difference between happiness and Christian Joy?**

Happiness is a *feeling* of being content. A more extreme emotion is blissful happiness. Happiness, like joy, can also be shared – I can feel happy because you are happy.

Christian joy is a state of being, involving gratitude for the gift of life; it leads to responsibility for caring for your own gift of life, and also caring for other people’s gift of life. That leads to compassion for other people and also to caring for the planet (a global response). Joy encompasses happiness, too, but it is not just a feeling.

❖ **Is it possible to find Joy in difficult times? Have you had any experiences of this?**

Well, we all experience difficult times – some more than others. Life has its ups and downs. There are some difficulties that are caused intentionally by other people. At those times we need the support of each other and the assurance that God is with us.

If we know *other* people who are suffering, we can offer to help or just to ‘be there’ to talk things through. Some people can offer joy to others by giving just what is needed (not too much or too little). Some offer their sense of humour – or wisdom - to ease tensions. Sometimes *joyfulness* is not appropriate, but a small smile may show that it may be possible to be joyful again one day.

Here’s an example: When my aunt was dying, I was very sad and grieving, and when I visited her I was at a loss to know how to bring her cheer. But she was a

very gracious person, and it was she who would give me cheer – she would re-energise my joy! She was lovely.

❖ **Do you think Joy depends on our mood?**

As human beings, we are capable of expressing a huge range of emotions, from misery to elation, some of which are governed by our physical health, such as being energetic or being tired. And of course only other people are ‘moody’ – not us!

Joy does not just depend on temporary feelings. Deep down there is that spark of joy, even if sometimes it can seem to shrink away. But it can be re-ignited by prayer, by professional support and by support from friends who gently share *their* joy.

❖ **Can you see Joy in other people’s life?**

Yes, there’s joy all around us! – the more you think about it, the more you recognise it.

Examples: You only have to look at the people next to you in the church...

I’m sure we can all think of someone who is joyous! I have a friend who is positively radiant with joy... She is 92 and she is very lively and creative, and gives everyone warm hugs. She prays every day: she calls it ‘tapping in to the God-source’. She cares for everyone she meets.

Advent is an opportunity for us all to recognise the joy of being and to ‘share the joy’ with everyone around us.

All Souls, St Peters, December 16th 2018.